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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES FOREIGN SECRETARY ON BURMA AND
ASEAN SUMMIT

REF: A. STATE 148530

- [1](#)B. USUN NEW YORK 986
- [1](#)C. USUN NEW YORK 970
- [1](#)D. MANILA 3565
- [1](#)E. MANILA 3510
- [1](#)F. MANILA 3449 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a frank and open discussion November 11 with the Ambassador, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo stressed his government's continued strong commitment to press for democratic change in Burma, but said it is difficult to assess whether recent actions on the part of the Burmese junta signify real change in the regime's behavior, or are merely a ploy intended to divert criticism from the international community. Romulo looks to the upcoming ASEAN Summit in Singapore to clarify both the junta's real intentions, as well as the mood of ASEAN members with regard to taking stronger measures to pressure Burma to move toward democratization. The Ambassador continues to press publicly for democratization in Burma, while Philippine statements on Burma remain robust and closely parallel U.S. views. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In public remarks commemorating Veterans Day at the American Cemetery November 11, the Ambassador underscored the importance of maintaining pressure on the Burmese regime to open a real dialogue with Burma's opposition and take concrete moves toward democratization. She also praised the Philippines' role in pressing for democratic change in Burma.

[1](#)3. (C) In a private conversation with the Ambassador following the ceremony, where he acted as guest speaker and gave a moving tribute to a century of U.S.-Philippine partnership (septel), Romulo spoke of the Burmese regime's recent moves to allow detained National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to meet with members of her party and UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari. The Foreign Secretary cautioned against concluding that it denoted any genuine change in the junta's policies, recalling the regime's long history of manipulating public perceptions to defuse outrage at its actions.

[1](#)4. (C) Noting that he will depart next week for the November 18-22 ASEAN Summit and related meetings in Singapore, the Foreign Secretary stated that although some ASEAN members had discussed not signing the organization's new charter in protest of Burma's crackdown on dissidents, Burma's presence at the Singapore meetings and ASEAN's consensus-based function likely precluded any dramatic measures of protest

against the junta's continued abuses. Although Romulo perceives ASEAN will not return to business as usual with Burma, but instead maintain pressure on the regime, he advised that such commitment is not uniform. Romulo said that "Indonesia is with us," but felt that only after ASEAN members convene in Singapore will a clearer picture emerge of Burma's true intentions, the views of ASEAN nations, and possible actions that ASEAN could take.

15. (SBU) The Philippine government has continued to take a strong public stance on Burma. In a November 6 statement before the UNSC during a debate on the role of regional and sub-regional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security (reftel B), Secretary Romulo reiterated support for UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, and called for national reconciliation and transition to democracy in Burma. Per reftel C, while in New York, Romulo discussed ASEAN's engagement on Burma with USUN Ambassador Khalilzad. Romulo mentioned to Ambassador that he very much appreciated the chance to share thoughts with Ambassador Khalilzad.
KENNEY